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since 1973 has increased by 77 percent, and if wages had kept pace with productivity, workers would be earning more than \$20 an hour. Instead, over 41 million American workers – a third of the workforce – earn less than \$12 an hour without employee-sponsored health insurance.

The capture of the economy by speculators, the deindustrialization of the country, the militarization of the police, and as we just saw in Portland, the lethal shooting of another American; 3.1 Americans are shot by police every day in the streets of American cities. In most cases, they're unarmed.

The stripping away of basic civil liberties, including due process. The trashing of the economy by the oligarchs who have in essence orchestrated a tax boycott: The highest rates of taxation for the wealthiest individuals and corporations under Eisenhower was 91 percent. Now large corporations like Bank of America don't even pay taxes, and this is while they essentially absolve themselves from all social responsibility, basically distorting all institutions and mechanisms of government to further consolidate their own power and amass greater wealth. As they do that, it becomes more and more punishing on the working class because they extract revenues from the most vulnerable.

So you have counties like St. Louis (Ill.) County; they depend, for 30 or 40 percent of their budget, on fines. It's just made-up crimes. Carrying an open container, not mowing your lawn – that's a fine in St. Louis County. Obstructing pedestrian traffic, which means standing too long on a sidewalk. Selling loose cigarettes, for which Eric Garner was killed. And if we don't address that anomie – the breaking of those social bonds – it doesn't really matter who's in office. You can get rid of Trump; it won't make any difference.

And of course we're not talking about it because the corporate forces that profit from that, and who see all mechanisms to create social solidarity as an impediment to profit, have complete control over the airwaves, academia (and) the two major political parties. And so the gravest social crisis is not discussed, along with the gravest existential crisis, which is climate change.

Joanne Zuhl: *You say it doesn't matter who's in office. We're coming up to an election, and a lot of people are looking forward to the vote as a way to flip the House and/or Senate. Is that just theater in your opinion? Is the election going to make any difference?*

C.H.: No, it's not going to make any difference. There's complete continuity on all of these issues no matter who's in office. In fact, the assault on civil liberties by Barack Obama was worse. He deported 4 million people. Arne Duncan (education secretary, 2009-15) was not privatizing and creating charter schools at quite the pace that (current Education Secretary Betsy) DeVos was, but these precedents were set.

You have one corporate party, and on one end you have troglodytes like the Sheldon Adelsons, the Mercers and Trump, who are unrepentant racists and bigots and Islamaphobes. And on the other end, you have Silicon Valley (types). They don't want



PHOTO BY REUTERS

Police stand guard during a stand off with protesters on a bridge during a protest against the Dakota Access pipeline near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation near Cannon Ball, North Dakota, Nov. 6, 2016. Hedges believes the event stands as a crucial lesson to any future resistance against corporate authority.

to be painted as homophobic or racist or Islamaphobic, but on all the structural issues, there's zero difference. And it's the structural issues that are destroying us, including destroying the ecosystem on which we depend for life.

So how do you want to take your poison? In the classy, well-mannered posture of a Barack Obama, or the crude manner of a Donald Trump?

We are on the cusp of another economic meltdown; they have, since 2008, created \$26 trillion out of electronic ether. They didn't invest it in the economy. They gambled with it. They bought back their own stock because their compensation packages are tied to it. And they hoarded it.

And this time around, when this – Marx calls it “fictitious capital” – when this bubble bursts, they don't have a Plan B. They can't lower interest rates any more than they've (already) lowered them. We will see even more egregious and naked forms of police repression, a further assault on the most basic civil liberties, including due process. All the things that poor people already experience will become more pronounced throughout the wider society. These tax cuts will erase – over 10 years – \$1.5 trillion from the federal budget.

Next year, we're on track to pay just over \$300 billion just on government debt on interest. Within 10 years, that will rise to \$900 billion just on interest. It's not a sustainable financial system. So we've undergone a corporate coup d'etat in slow motion, and these people are just pillaging and destroying the country. And anybody who is poor understands: We don't live in a

democratic state. It's fictitious. We're watching it with the Kavanaugh hearing. It's just political theater. The judicial process is political theater. The legislative process is political theater. It's become tribal. People don't care about truth; they don't care about justice. We are no longer a society rooted in verifiable fact. It's all of the hallmarks of an emerging totalitarian system. And nobody's even raising the issue. They're all sitting around watching Stormy Daniels.

J.Z.: *You have talked about Standing Rock – the protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in South Dakota – as something we should be paying attention to and learning from. Why Standing Rock in particular?*

C.H.: Standing Rock's important because it was an act of sustained mass civil disobedience, very rooted in a spiritual understanding of the sacred. It was led by indigenous communities.

You can always tell when the state is worried because they respond with draconian force. So the Women's March in Washington, they

couldn't care less. But when you obstruct their ability to make money – in this case trying to block a pipeline – then they react viciously as they did. Attack dogs on the crowds, over 700 arrests, constant infiltration and surveillance, hosing protesters down with water cannons laced with pepper spray in sub-zero temperatures. And that's the kind of resistance we have to mount if we're going to save ourselves, because it's only going to get worse. It's probably going to get much worse.

Everyone has to organize, including the

homeless. I know it's hard, because of all of the stresses of being homeless. Life's one long emergency when you're living on the street, and it takes a physical toll that's debilitating. But everyone has to rise up. If we don't take over this system and we don't overthrow it fast, climate change alone will extinguish the human species.

One of the reasons climate scientists are so frightened of going above 2 degrees Celsius is because of feedback loops. In essence the degradation of the biosphere becomes so pronounced that there's nothing you can do to stop it. And we know what feedback loops do because they've studied it on planets like Venus, which once had water and is now 800 degrees.

We're just not responding. We're entranced by these electronic hallucinations fed to us by corporate power.

J.Z.: *There are multiple movements – #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and we had Colin Kaepernick, who turned the NFL on its ear for a while. What are your thoughts on these efforts?*

C.H.: Those movements, I support them, but they've got to be tied to economic structures, which they're not. There are segments of corporate power that are quite comfortable with identity politics, multiculturalism and diversity, as long as those who come from that community serve the system. So neo-liberalism as an ideology is about radical individualism; it's about destroying communal structures that make it possible to resist.

There's a large segment of the corporate capitalism that are quite comfortable with the Me Too movement, or diversity, as long as it doesn't include a critique of the systems themselves.

Radical individualism is not a positive force. Because it elevates the cult of the self and promotes the idea that your identity and your interests are paramount to everyone around you. And the corporate state is comfortable with that; that doesn't bother them. So I certainly support Black Lives Matter and I support all these groups, but I worry that they're not addressing the structural issues.

What will happen with a societal breakdown – and I saw it in Yugoslavia when I covered the war – you will get demagogues like Trump who will essentially green-light violent attacks against the “other,” including, of course, the poor, but also African-Americans, Muslims, undocumented workers, as a way of channeling this inchoate rage toward the vulnerable. As if 12 million undocumented workers are somehow responsible for our economic decline. It's absurd. It's just ridiculous, but it works. You're already seeing it in the rhetoric of Trump.

J.Z.: *You've also spoken about teaching in prison, that people who were incarcerated taught you possibly more about resistance than anything else.*

C.H.: In terms of prison, we have 25 percent of the world's prison population because when you deindustrialize those urban centers, the only way most of the people could make a living was in an illegal economy, which means their poverty